

Bee Keeping



LeRoy Cobia, a retired employee of Crop Science Consulting, spoke at the Optimist Club about bee keeping. Bees are the only insect used commercially. They use pollen for protein and nectar carbohydrate.

He gets bees from Draper bees. Worker bees come in a box of 2000 bees. Queen bees are ordered separately. He gets new queen bees every two or three years. When ordering bees, the queen bee is kept separate from the worker bees. The workers will kill any queen that does not smell like them. Therefore, the queen is kept in a small cage with an entrance that is blocked with sugar. It takes the bees several days to eat through the sugar and release the queen. By that time she smells like them and they accept her.

Last year Cobia got 110 pounds of honey from six hives. An active hive in pollen season can have 60,000 bees in it. Cobia doesn't sell his honey, but gives it away. He donated two bee bears to the Optimist Club for auctioning.

Worker bees are all female. The male bees cannot survive by themselves. They need to be fed. Their only purpose is to fertilize the queen. Male bees will die in the winter. Males have large eyes and no stinger.

In a normal hive of bees, 4%-5% of the bees are guard bees. With African bees, also called killer bees, 90% of the bees will attack intruders. Killer bees are more aggressive than other bees, hatch sooner, and will quickly take over a hive. Fortunately, killer bees usually don't survive an Iowa winter.

Queen bees can lay 2000 eggs a day. Worker bees and queen bees develop from the same larvae. Queen bees have a larger cell in the hive and are fed royal jelly for their full term while worker bees are only fed royal jelly for three days. A queen will kill other queens that hatch in the hive.

When the hive gets crowded, the bees will swarm. The old queen will leave with the swarm. A swarm is usually friendly. The bees swarm around the queen. Beekeepers can cut off the branch where the bees are and put it in a hive, if the bees have not moved far.